

own. Many Christians in the world, like Karla, experience this daily. What might it feel like to have to keep your faith quiet, not to be able to worship freely, not be able to speak about or share your faith with others?

Jesus says 'if these were silent, the stones would shout out'. What does he mean? What point is he making about what happens when worship is suppressed and its people persecuted? Think about the place of silence in your usual worship setting. When is silence rather than sounds or songs important in worship?

Some questions to think about

- There are a number of secular voices around today saying we should only trust our human instincts and ideas? How would you respond?
- What sort of modern temptations can distract us from hearing and responding to God's Word?

REFLECTION AND PRAYER

Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us
and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
Selah
that your way may be made known
upon the earth,
your saving power among the nations.
Let the peoples praise you O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you guide the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon the earth. Selah
let the people praise you O God; let all the people praise you.
The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God has blessed us.
May God continue to bless us;
let all the ends of the earth revere him.



Dunbarney and Forgandenny Parish Church

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LENT 2009: Sense Making Faith Week 6 - Journey into Hearing

We are surrounded by all kinds of sounds and if we tried to hear everything at once – the TV, people talking, the phone ringing, the cat mewing, the door slamming in the wind, the baby crying – we would become disoriented and unable to do anything. So we filter what we hear, deciding from moment to moment where to focus our attention.



A person who is concentrating really hard on a task may not hear what is said to her; you know if a person is listening really carefully to you or is being distracted by something or someone else. The ability to listen and to focus our attention is an opportunity and a problem. Listening is integral to sharing our faith, discerning what God wants, and in caring, helping and healing. It is fundamental to pastoral care of any kind. But we can also focus our listening attention in the wrong places or in the wrong way, missing things which are not said, or failing to notice other important voices.



Christian worship is also full of sound, music, speech, reading, praying, praising. Although different kinds of worship have their own distinctive music and sounds, worship does still have its own particular rhythms and cadences which identify it as worship. We say the Lord's Prayer or psalms together in a way that it different from just reading the words aloud. Silence too, as absence of sound (which we still 'hear') is also important in Christian worship.

Jesus would have been very aware of the praise to God which attended his arrival into Jerusalem, as opposed to excited conversations and cries of welcome. He would have been even more

aware of the difference between loving praise to God which he heard on his entry into Jerusalem and the shouts of 'crucify him!' which he heard on Good Friday.

So it is worth meditating on the sounds and music of Holy Week and what they have to tell us about the spiritual journey through hearing and listening.

ACTIVITY

Pause for five minutes and write down all the sounds you can hear. Do you know what all the sounds are and where they are all coming from? Can you hear your blood pumping and your breathing? Are there more sounds to listen to than you expected? What sort of sounds would you normally not pay any attention to?

Say (or sing) the Lord's Prayer or a favourite hymn. Listen to the sounds carefully. What makes doing this into prayer or praise?

THINKING ABOUT BEING DEAF

The world of the deaf can be a rich source of communication and deaf worship is a thriving and dramatic way of relating to the gospel. Silence too, is a rich source of spiritual growth. Talking to someone who will keep confidences, such as a Christian minister, doctor, lawyer or counsellor can be a tremendous source of relief for people.



Jesus also alerts us to spiritual deafness which disables people much more than physical deafness. Just as physical deafness means people have to pay close attention in order to communicate, so people can 'switch off' and fail to hear what God is saying to us through scripture and Christian

faith. We can fill our heads with other kinds of spiritual noise or convince ourselves that what we want to hear must be the right way to go. Jesus tells us that we are fooling ourselves when we fall into spiritual deafness and stop paying attention to our relationship with God.

ACTIVITY

Put some headphones on and play something through them until you can hear as little external noise as possible and then ask someone to talk to you. What do you have to do to make out what they are saying? Try and carry on a conversation using whatever signs you find necessary. How much more effort do you have to put in to the process of communication?

Do you think you put enough effort into prayer and worship? What are the signs of spiritual deafness?

READ Luke 19:28-44 (Jesus enters Jerusalem)

A STORY

Karla gets out of bed and walks down the street to her friend's house. She brings some bread rolls, some dried figs and an old bottle full of water. She is careful to blend in when she walks down the street and not look as if she is doing anything out of the ordinary. At the corner near her friend's house, she stops and checks if anyone is arriving. If there is someone at the door, she will walk around the houses again. It is clear. The friend opens the door and Karla quickly goes inside. They go to a room at the back of the house. They are meeting for worship, about four people in all, who are willing to risk it. They have no Bible, it was taken from them some time ago and Karla's friend was in trouble for possessing it, even though freedom to worship is supposedly permitted by their country. Instead, they remember together favourite stories from scripture and pray together in whispers. They light a candle, break the bread and drink the water together, and share the figs. Another person keeps a watch. They will be in a great deal of trouble if the police come in. There is a church in the village, but it is used for other purposes, they cannot visit it. But they will always risk coming together for worship, even if they must gather in silence. For them, it is worth it.

The story of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is very familiar to Christians. Try looking at this passage as a struggle to pray and worship freely in a place where the authorities want to suppress it for reasons of their